

Spermicides: foam, film, suppositories

Where can you get vaginal spermicides?

Spermicides are available without a prescription at many locations, including drug stores, school health clinics, Planned Parenthood, public health department clinics, community service offices (CSOs) and other community health clinics, etc.

How vaginal spermicides work:

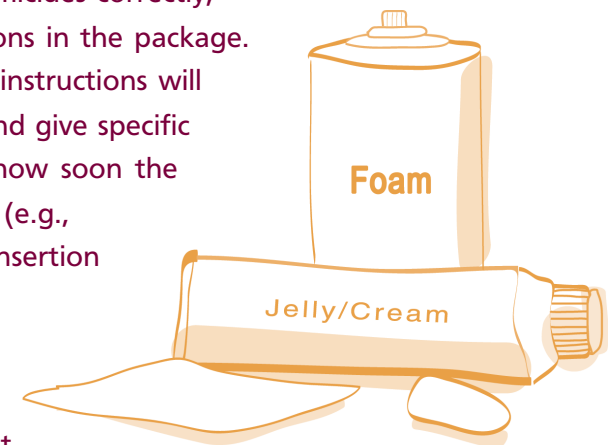
Vaginal spermicides come in several forms (gel, foam, cream, film, suppository, or tablet). Spermicides are chemicals that kill sperm. Some spermicides are commonly used along with a diaphragm or cap (i.e., gels, creams and foam) and others can be used alone. Spermicides are also used along with a condom to increase protection against pregnancy.

Nonoxynol-9 (the active chemical used in products available in the United States) destroys the sperm cell membrane. Other spermicides are used in products made in other countries.

How to use vaginal spermicides:

To use vaginal spermicides correctly, follow the instructions in the package. Often the package instructions will provide drawings and give specific instructions about how soon the method is effective (e.g., immediately after insertion or to wait 10-15 minutes).

You should not douche until at least 6 hours after sexual intercourse to avoid washing away the spermicide and decreasing



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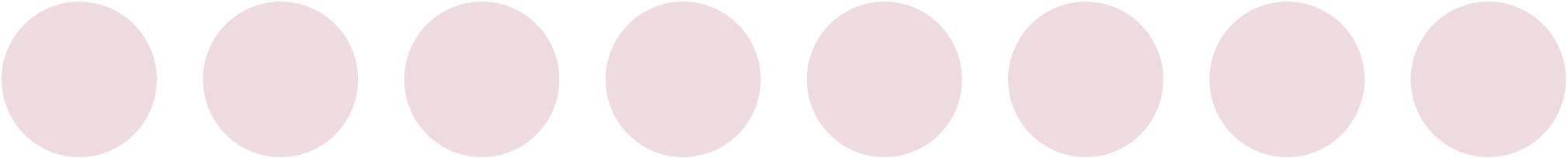
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ing the effectiveness. For a spermicide to be effective it must be in the vagina for no more than 1 hour before sex. To increase the effectiveness, use the spermicide along with a condom.

Effectiveness rates:

If a vaginal spermicide is used every time of sexual intercourse and always used the correct way (perfect use), the effectiveness rate is as high as 94%. Because a spermicide may not be used every time, the typical use effectiveness is 74% or lower; 26 women out of 100 could become pregnant within the first year of use.

Benefits and advantages of spermicides:

Spermicides are an over-the-counter birth control method. Spermicides are used as a back-up method when beginning pills, when pills are missed or when you are waiting to get an IUD. They can also be easily kept for immediate protection, for those who do not have sexual intercourse frequently. Using spermicide will not protect against HIV (AIDs) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as gonorrhea and chlamydia.

Potential side effects or disadvantages:

Some people report allergic reactions to spermicides, but sometimes trying a different brand can help. Some people find the insertion of spermicides difficult.

Potential risks:

No known health risks.